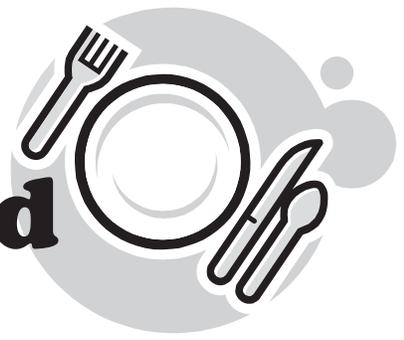


Foods for Your Preschool Child



Good eating habits can help promote your child's good health and happiness. Lifetime eating habits and attitudes about food usually are formed in early childhood. You can help your child develop good habits by making mealtime pleasant and relaxed. Mealtime can be a time to enjoy a variety of aromas, flavors, textures and colors that foods offer.

A child may be irritable and refuse food for variety of reasons: if overly tired at mealtime; if meals are hurried and family members rush off from meals to watch TV or do other things; or if family members air their disagreements at mealtime.

If these situations seem familiar during your mealtime, try making some small changes that create a more relaxed atmosphere that will help your preschooler enjoy mealtime. Here are some suggestions:

- ▶ Serve small portions on a small plate.
- ▶ Serve new foods at the beginning of a meal while your child is hungry. Serve familiar foods with new foods. A disliked food may be accepted later if the issue isn't forced.
- ▶ Use your imagination, and serve food in different ways:
 - Cut meat in strips or bite-sized pieces.
 - Cut vegetables and fruit in rings.
 - Serve foods in a pretty (unbreakable) dish.
 - Make a raisin face on oatmeal.
- ▶ Be casual, friendly, patient and set a good example:
 - Say nice things about food.
 - Enter into friendly conversations.
 - Practice good manners. Children are great imitators.
- ▶ Let children help. Eating is more fun for the child who helps prepare the meal. Children can scrub potatoes or carrots, set the table (so what if silver is misplaced?), pour milk onto cereal from a small pitcher or do other small tasks.
- ▶ Children like to feed themselves and, even though it may be messy, they need to learn. They'll use fingers first, but then you can patiently show them how to hold and use a spoon and fork. Be prepared for accidents, and keep your sense of humor.
- ▶ Allow time to eat, and have meals at regular times so your child will be ready to eat.

If there is dawdling and the food isn't eaten in 20 to 30 minutes, take the food away with a firm "no more for now." This will make it clear that meals have a time limit. Do try to be consistent. Your child will be confused if there is a time limit at one meal and no time limit at the next meal. Let small children leave the table when they have finished eating. They have trouble sitting still for long, and a simple "May I be excused?" can soon be learned. If mealtime is fun for everyone, your child might want to stay longer.

Food used as a reward gives confusing messages to a young child. Withholding dessert often is used as a way to get a child to eat the rest of a meal. This makes dessert seem more special than other foods served. Another concern is that foods most commonly offered as rewards for good behavior are not the most nutritious.

But it is not a good idea to offer nutritious food as a reward to your child either. Eating should be enjoyable and should provide the nutrients needed for good health. Using food to control behavior can lead to eating problems that can last throughout life. Rewards for good behavior might include reading a book together, playing a game or taking a trip to a favorite spot.

Serve many different kinds of fruits, vegetables, milk, cheese, meats, cereals, breads and desserts. Experiment and serve these in many different ways. From these experiences at home, your child will learn to like many foods. Eating a greater variety of foods is more likely to result in good nutrition.

A child eats more one day than another. Children grow in spurts – sometimes fast, sometimes slow – and their appetites go up and down with growth rate. Sometimes they hardly touch food. At other times, they eat everything in sight. This is normal. Continue to offer good food in small portions. If more is wanted, serve second helpings.

Forcing a child to clean the plate may create a lifetime dislike for certain foods or may develop the habit of overeating.

Everyone needs many different nutrients for good health. Nutrients are in food. The nutrients needed are vitamins, minerals, water, carbohydrates, amino acids from protein and certain fatty acids from fat.

Choosing a variety of foods from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's MyPyramid will provide nutrients needed for good health. These food groups are grains, fruits, vegetables, milk, and meat and beans.

Children need the same kinds of foods that adults need. Only the amounts differ. The recommended amounts from the food groups depend on the child's calorie needs based on age and activity. Use the chart below to find the total daily amounts of each food group recommended for each calorie level. Divide the recommended daily amounts of each group into smaller portion sizes for your child's meals and snacks.

Some nutrition experts recommend giving children about 1 tablespoon of food on the plate for each year of age. Offering children smaller servings and allowing them to ask for more, satisfies their hunger and does not waste food.

Daily Amount of Food From Each Group				
	Calorie Level			
	1,000	1,200	1,400	1,600
Food Group				
Fruits	1 cup	1 cup	1.5 cups	1.5 cups
Vegetables	1 cup	1.5 cups	1.5 cups	2 cups
Grains	3-oz equiv	4-oz equiv	5-oz equiv	5-oz equiv
Meat/beans	2-oz equiv	3-oz equiv	4-oz equiv	5-oz equiv
Milk	2 cups	2 cups	2 cups	3 cups
Oils	3 tsp	4 tsp	4 tsp	5 tsp
Discretionary calorie allowance*				
	165	171	171	132

*A new term included in MyPyramid. Discretionary calories are those remaining after eating the recommended amounts from the food groups that are fat-free or low-fat and with no added sugars.



Grains
<p>1-ounce equivalent of grains equals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 slice of bread • 1 cup ready-to-eat cereal, flakes or rounds • 1/2 cup of cooked cereal, rice or pasta
<p><i>This group furnishes carbohydrate for energy; protein to build muscles and other body tissue; iron for health blood (if the products are whole-grain or enriched); B vitamins to aid in energy production; and fiber (if products are whole-grain).</i></p>
Vegetables
<p>1 cup vegetables equals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 cups raw, leafy vegetables • 1 cup cooked vegetables • 1 cup vegetable juice
Fruits
<p>1 cup fruit equals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 medium apple, orange, banana, pear • 1 cup chopped, cooked or canned fruit • 1/2 cup dried fruit • 1 cup 100% fruit juice
<p><i>The vegetable and fruit groups furnish vitamin A for healthy skin and eyes, vitamin C to help resist infection and fiber for regular bowel movements.</i></p>
Milk
<p>1 cup milk equals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 cup milk or yogurt • 2 ounces processed cheese • 2 cups cottage cheese
<p><i>Children ages 2 to 8 need two servings from the milk group daily. Several small servings daily may be served for a total of two servings. The group furnishes protein for growth and maintenance, and calcium and vitamin D for healthy bones and teeth.</i></p>
Meat & Beans
<p>1 ounce of meat equals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 ounce cooked lean beef, chicken, turkey, pork or fish • 1/4 cup cooked dry beans or tofu • 1 soy burger patty • 1 egg • 1 tablespoon peanut butter
<p><i>This group furnishes protein to build muscles and other body tissue, iron to build blood and B vitamins to aid in energy production.</i></p>

Note: Frankfurters and other luncheon meats are a real favorite of many children, but moderation is important in using these because they are high in fat and sodium.

Safety note: Frankfurters should be served to children only if they can chew very well. One of the most common causes of choking in small children is a piece of frankfurter caught in the throat. For small children, cut the frankfurter lengthwise and crosswise so pieces are no larger than a pea.

How About Vitamins and Other Supplements?



Some parents think all children need extra nutrients in the form of vitamin pills or drops. Most children who eat a varied diet from the food groups described do not need the supplements. Children who have eaten poorly balanced diets for a long time, however, may require the extra nutrients. Let your doctor decide if vitamins or mineral supplements are needed.

The safest choice for supplements is one that provides nutrient amounts similar to those of the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs). Toxic reactions may occur when large amounts of any one nutrient are supplied in concentrated form.

What Children Like

Young children have a keen sense of smell and taste, so foods don't have to be salty or highly seasoned to be appealing. In preparing meals and snacks, remember that children like:

- Bright colors: carrots, peas, orange slices; fruits and vegetables can add eye appeal to meals and snacks.
- Mild flavors: young carrots, new potatoes, bananas and applesauce; if you prepare cauliflower, cabbage or broccoli, cook a very short time to prevent developing strong flavors.
- Different textures: crisp raw fruits and vegetables, smooth soups and puddings, soft-cooked meat or eggs.
- Finger foods: small pieces of lettuce or bread or cheese and bread sandwiches cut into small pieces.
- Different temperatures: warm enough to be appetizing but cooler than adults generally prefer. Cold foods such as custards and ice cream are favorites with children.
- Unmixed, simple foods: plain meat and vegetables that can be identified rather than being mixed up in a casserole. Children prefer plain lettuce, sliced tomatoes and carrot sticks to tossed salad.

Food Not Suitable for Children

Very young children may not be able to tolerate some foods because their body systems are not fully developed. Rich, fatty foods such as pies and fried food, and very coarse foods such as bran, may irritate the digestive system. Young children may swallow whole or choke on hard-to-chew or round foods such as nuts, popcorn, grapes or hotdogs. Highly spiced foods and strongly flavored foods are not usually well-liked. Foods that contain the stimulant caffeine such as coffee, teas and colas are not suitable for children.

Snacks Are Food

A child usually needs to eat more than three times a day, so snacks help to furnish the necessary food. Without snacks, a child may become tired and overly hungry. It's a good idea to make snacks the smallest part of the day's food supply.

It's best to serve snacks about the same time each day, not closer than an hour before or after mealtime. Children may ask for something to eat before meals because they are hungry, and the smell and sight of food stimulate the appetite. A small portion of mild, raw vegetable or fruit can prevent excessive hunger and will not spoil the appetite. A child may decide not to eat at mealtime if snacks are available right after a meal.

Snacks offer a wonderful chance to give children new and different foods. Snacks chosen from MyPyramid increase the likelihood of eating recommended servings in each group. The best snacks provide protein, minerals or vitamins while being low in sugar, fat and salt.

Current studies show that starchy foods, such as potato chips and even some fruits and fruit juices, are as likely to cause tooth decay as do candy, cookies and other sweets. To guard against cavities, dentists suggest getting kids to brush with fluoride toothpaste as soon as possible after eating starchy or sweet foods. Of course, regular dental checkups and care are essential for preventing tooth decay.

Most people, including children, enjoy sweet, high-fat or salty snacks, but such foods should be used occasionally, not every day. Eating a high-saturated-fat diet may lead to development of heart disease, a major health problem in the United States. Too much salt may contribute to high blood pressure. Sugar provides calories but no nutrients.

How do the snacks your children eat rate? Check the lists below.

- ▶ Serve often – snacks high in protein, vitamins or minerals:
 - Raw vegetables such as carrots or celery sticks, cauliflower flowerets, cabbage or lettuce wedges.
 - Fresh or canned fruit or juice
 - Hard-cooked or deviled eggs
 - Toast, bread or cereal with milk
 - Milk or milk drinks
 - Crackers or bread with peanut butter, cheese or meat
 - Yogurt (plain or with fruit)
- ▶ Occasionally serve:
 - Cookies containing oatmeal, peanut butter or chopped nuts, carrots, raisins or other dried fruit with milk
 - Ice cream, ice milk, frozen yogurt



► Serve sparingly – snacks high in calories, sugar, fat or salt:

- Candy
- Cold drinks
- Doughnuts
- Snack crackers, puffs, cheese-flavored curls
- Most cookies, cakes and pies
- Fruit-flavored drinks
- Potato chips, corn chips

Some cookies, cakes and pies are more nutritious than others, but because of their high sugar and fat content, they are not recommended for frequent snacks.

If You Think Your Child Has Eating Problems

A child's eating habits may be a source of constant worry. If you think your child overeats, under-eats, is overweight or too thin, check with your family doctor for any medical problems. Your health provider can use growth charts and medical tests to determine your child's growth rate. If your child is growing well with no weight problems, stop worrying.

Because growth is not constant, children will eat less during "slowdown" stages of growth. For the child who doesn't eat much, continue offering good, nutritious food in a pleasing way. Children often go on eating jags in which they eat mostly one or two foods for a few days. Don't let this be a worry. Eating jags are usually temporary.

If obesity is a problem, see if your child is eating too many high-fat or sweet foods. Are their snacks nutritious or do they contribute too many calories? Does your child get enough exercise? Experts recommend that children engage in a minimum of 60 minutes of physical activity each day. Many children who are overweight have one or more overweight parents. This condition may occur because the children follow their parents' eating and exercise habits. It may be helpful to see that the family's meals and snacks contain more fruit, vegetables and grains and foods lower in fat, calories and salt.

The best way for your child to develop good eating habits is to make mealtime a happy time for the whole family. This also makes good memories.

Contact your local parish office of the LSU AgCenter for more information on healthier eating for the whole family.

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